

NCDOT Wants to Help You Save Time, Money Over Holidays



As families travel over the river and through the woods for celebrations, the N.C. Department of Transportation will suspend most road construction activities on major routes across the state to help make their trips a little smoother. By avoiding traffic delays, motorists can reach their destinations safely and efficiently, while cutting down on fuel consumption and costs. The list of closures will be available closer to the holidays on [our website](#).

For real-time travel information at any time, visit the [Travel section](#) of the NCDOT website or follow NCDOT on [Twitter](#).

Here are some additional tips for navigating the highways safely during the holiday travel season:

- Leave early to get a head start on your drive. Travel at non-peak hours when possible.
- Stay alert. Even if work is suspended, you may encounter narrowed lanes and traffic shifts in work zones.
- Be patient and obey the posted speed limit.
- Use alternate routes, when possible, to avoid traffic congestion.
- Stay informed. Real-time travel information is available online

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N.C. Transportation Now

On the latest N.C. Transportation now, the department shares safety tips for drone use, DMV offices across the state get upgrades for next generation driver licenses, and NCDOT wants to hear what your favorite trails are around the state.

[Watch this week's N.C. Transportation Now](#)

and over the phone by dialing 511.

- Don't drive drowsy. Travel at times when you are normally awake, and take frequent breaks.
- Avoid distracted driving. When drivers stop focusing on the road ahead, they react more slowly to traffic conditions and are more likely to be involved in an accident.

Improvements for U.S. 221 in High Country Well Underway



While the U.S. 321 project in Blowing Rock gets most of the public attention in Division 11, work on another major highway improvement in High Country has been underway for several months.

The \$144 million U.S. 221 widening project will improve more than 16 miles of highway between U.S. 421 in Deep Gap and N.C. 88 in Jefferson, turning a two-lane road into a four-lane median highway in five locations, each considered its own project.

The purpose of the project is to improve regional connectivity along a busy travel corridor, with an increased traffic capacity to alleviate congestion. This will help make the road safer by reducing the number of crashes.

Work is already underway between south of N.C. 194 and north of N.C. 163 in Ashe County. In addition to the added lanes, this part will have eight-foot shoulders and a 36-foot-wide grassed median. Completion is expected by September 2018, although about 25 percent of the work is already complete.

As for the impact to motorists for this work, there will be a detour set up at times, and alternating lane closures are planned for the work already started. Drivers need to pay extra attention as they travel through the work zone.

Contracts for two more sections were awarded this fall, covering

almost three miles in Watauga and Ashe counties between U.S. 421 in Deep Gap and Idlewild Road, and then nearly two more miles in Ashe County between Idlewild Road and the south fork of the New River. Work on those parts is expected to get under way in Spring 2016.

Still to come for Ashe County is a four-mile section between north of the South Fork of the New River and south of N.C. 194 in Ashe County, and then 3.5 miles between N.C. 163 and U.S. 221 Business/N.C. 88. Those contracts will be awarded in 2017 and 2019, respectively.

Governor McCrory Announces Accelerated Timelines for Major Transportation Projects

Governor Pat McCrory announced that the final leg of the eastern section of the Winston-Salem Northern Beltway, the Asheville Connector, the Weddington Road/I-485 interchange and the Mid-Currituck bridge are among the numerous projects that will be accelerated thanks to the reforms of the 2015-17 budget the governor signed into law.

Local, Division 11 projects also being accelerated and additional projects can be found [here](#).

"The reforms I signed into law will get these roads built sooner," Governor McCrory said. "The primary purpose of the reforms was to ensure transportation funds were being spent on transportation projects and not diverted to other state programs."

The budget reforms signed by Governor McCrory added over \$700 million in new funding for transportation over two years and ended the annual transfer of \$216 million from the Highway Fund to the General Fund. Over 10 years, these budget reforms are projected to provide an additional \$1.6 billion for North Carolina Department of Transportation construction projects.

"These budget reforms, coupled with our 25-Year Vision and the new transportation funding formula that emphasizes congestion relief, safety and job-creation will make North Carolina more competitive and prepared for future economic growth," Governor McCrory said.

Significant new and accelerated highway projects made possible by the additional revenue include

- Funding all four sections of the final leg of the eastern section of the Winston-Salem Northern Beltway, which is also part of the Future Interstate 74 corridor (only segment A had been funded). The interchange at U.S. 52 also is funded;

- Accelerating by three years the Weddington Road/I-485 interchange in Mecklenburg County;
- Accelerating by one year into the first five years of the STIP Segment B of the Asheville Connector; and
- Accelerating by two years the Mid-Currituck Bridge, a toll bridge in Currituck County.

The complete list of accelerated schedules for transportation projects was presented to the Board of Transportation for their review at the December meeting last week, with their approval expected in January 2016.

NCDOT Offers Tips for Drone Safety



This holiday season, one of the most popular gifts could literally fly off the shelves.

Whether they're called quadcopters, radio controlled planes, or any of the high-tech brand names, drones are expected to be big sellers this year, with some estimating as many as 700,000 will make their way into Americans' homes by the end of December.

All of these devices fall under the category of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS). UAS technology is an exciting and evolving field, which can lead to confusion for both UAS owners and the general public. The N.C. Department of Transportation is offering tips to help UAS owners enjoy their new technology while protecting citizens' safety and privacy.

"We're proud of North Carolina's legacy of being first in manned flight," said NCDOT Secretary Nick Tennyson. "The academic and industry researchers in our state will make us a leader in unmanned flight as well."

NCDOT's Division of Aviation has established guidelines for UAS operation in North Carolina. Both the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the NCDOT Division of Aviation classify UAS flight operations by three categories:

- Recreational - Any UAS flight that is conducted solely for the purpose of recreation.
- Government - Any UAS flight conducted by a government entity to support their work.

- Commercial - Any UAS flight that serves a business purpose or provides a business benefit, even if that benefit is indirect.

Government and commercial UAS operators must adhere to state and federal requirements established by the North Carolina General Assembly and the FAA. Each classification is subject to specific regulations and guidelines.

Many of the UAS owners who receive a drone during this holiday season will use them for purely recreational purposes. While recreational UAS flights are not heavily regulated, the FAA and model aircraft enthusiast groups have established a number of guidelines which should be followed to ensure a fun and safe experience:

- Always fly below an altitude of 400 feet and fly within your direct line of sight.
- Do not fly within 5 miles of an airport, near stadiums or other public events, or for compensation.
- Do not fly UAS that weigh more than 55 pounds.
- Do not fly at night, even if your UAS is equipped with lights.

"UAS technology is fun and exciting, but it needs to be used responsibly," said Division of Aviation Director Bobby Walston. "These guidelines will help ensure the safety of people in the air and on the ground."

UAS operators, whether recreational, government or commercial, should keep in mind that North Carolina has laws governing drone use. UAS users are subject to all North Carolina laws, even if UAS technology is not specifically mentioned. Current and potential drone owners can find more information about state and federal UAS regulations on the Division of Aviation's website.

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